

WASHINGTON--A new issue brief from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) examines the challenges facing state homeland security directors. The brief outlines the results of the second annual survey of 55 homeland security directors in the states, commonwealths and territories.

According to the brief, "At all levels of government, homeland security organizations are still in their infancy...As these organizations gain their institutional footing, questions abound for policymakers. What does an effective state homeland security strategy look like?...What are the top priorities of the men and women charged with protecting state citizens from terrorism and other disasters?"

"Since the release of the first survey in 2005, homeland security directors have faced such challenges as hurricanes, the emerging threat of avian influenza and the implications of a potential global pandemic," said John Ratliff, director of Homeland Security and Technology for the NGA Center. "This second survey gauges progress in key areas such as governance and strategy, coordination between government and the private sector and operations in light of this new context."

The 2006 results show a continued effort by states to make progress on existing and emerging issues. Key findings of the survey include:

Pandemic influenza and natural disasters joined the list of top priorities from the previous year's survey. Ongoing top priorities include interoperability, intelligence and coordination with local agencies.

State homeland security directors continue to be concerned about the lack of state input into federal policy development. Directors are nearly unanimous in their recommendation that the federal government coordinate with states prior to adopting and implementing policies.

The multiple demands on National Guard forces have left more than half of the states with a diminished capability to meet responsibilities of state emergency plans.

State homeland security directors view the primary DHS state grant program as under emphasizing disaster prevention and recovery.

Eighty percent of respondents are in the process of coordinating homeland security plans with infrastructure owned by the private sector. For example, more than 50 percent of homeland security directors report coordinating with surrounding states to protect ports, transit systems, agriculture, energy infrastructure, water infrastructure and public health infrastructure.

A majority of homeland security directors are somewhat or completely dissatisfied with the specificity and actionable quality of the intelligence their states receive from the federal government.

"Homeland security continues to evolve to meet a host of natural and man-made challenges," said John Thomasian, director of the NGA Center. "This year's survey showed that states continue to progress, maintaining efforts from previous years while recognizing that new threats also must be addressed."

Individual homeland security directors offered useful strategies for streamlining federal-state relations, increasing the state role in DHS decision making and working with the private sector. Proposed efforts include increasing flexibility for state use of DHS funds, producing more information to make federal intelligence usable and decreasing onerous paperwork requirements.